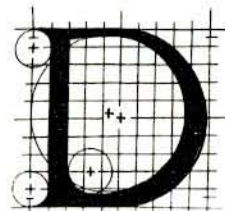


## CHAPTER 4

# REVITALISATION



URING THE

1970s there was a change of attitude to planning and building in the cities. The pedestrian, neglected in the boom years of the 1960s, was given long overdue attention. New buildings, though certainly not all, showed increased respect for the existing built fabric. Conservation became a catchword and the destruction of the townscape slowed down. Old buildings became valued not just for their intrinsic qualities, but for the part they could play in accommodating new functions. These considerations helped pave the way towards more handsome and more humane cities.

Dissent against establishment values that had been marked elsewhere in the sixties by riots, student protest and the dissociation of youth from the mainstream of opinion, became manifest later in Australia. Australian society tends to be conservative and the protests were not as vocal or as violent as in some other countries. But the discontent, fanned by such controversial topics as the Vietnam War, was certainly there. A more acute social conscience emerged and the fruits of prosperity were viewed with critical eyes.

A clearly discernible change took place in the architectural profession. In some ways it assumed a leadership role, and in others was forced to alter its position by pressure from social and political factions. Architecture schools, such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Sydney University and the Hobart College of Advanced Education, heralded the way with changed curricula instigated

by students and the attuned members of faculty. There was increased emphasis on the social sciences and humanities, and design exercises were oriented towards solutions for underprivileged groups, such as those of the poorer areas of the cities and the Aborigines. These schools stepped out of their ivory towers and became involved in the real world of community issues. Hostility from extreme student groups was voiced against architects who in any way could be labelled 'capitalist'. In the most radical days, highly motivated student bodies strove to dissociate themselves from building as such, especially development schemes for profit. While this diverted attention from professional technical skills, it was a healthy movement increasing architects' social awareness. Architecture had become too involved with how to build rather than why to build and for whom to build. The focus shifted from the impersonal, corporate client to the user.

During the sixties the voices of architects had been raised against the seeming lack of concern for the built environment. Boyd published his book *The Australian Ugliness*<sup>1</sup> in 1960 and various 'Outrage' exhibitions were held by the chapters of the Institute of Architects over the following years.<sup>2</sup> But these protests were mostly directed against visual poverty and they were isolated. They lacked the community support that made possible the changes of the seventies.

Indicative of the altered attitudes throughout the country was the election to national government in 1972 of the Labor Party; its first victory since 1946. Under the leadership of Gough Whitlam it was an idealist and reformist government. Labor's stay in power was short but the legacy and the repercussion of its enthusiastic disruption of the status quo, remain.

It was in the cities that the debit side of prosperity had first become evident. In the late 1960s, Sydney, in particular, looked as if it were recovering from bomb damage with large craters scarring the sites, hoardings marking the streets and cranes puncturing the skyline. Australian cities have always had dynamic cores with footpaths bustling with activity, but by 1970 the centres had lost much of their attraction. Also the rapid increase in population and the migration from the rural areas to the cities led to higher demands. At present 63

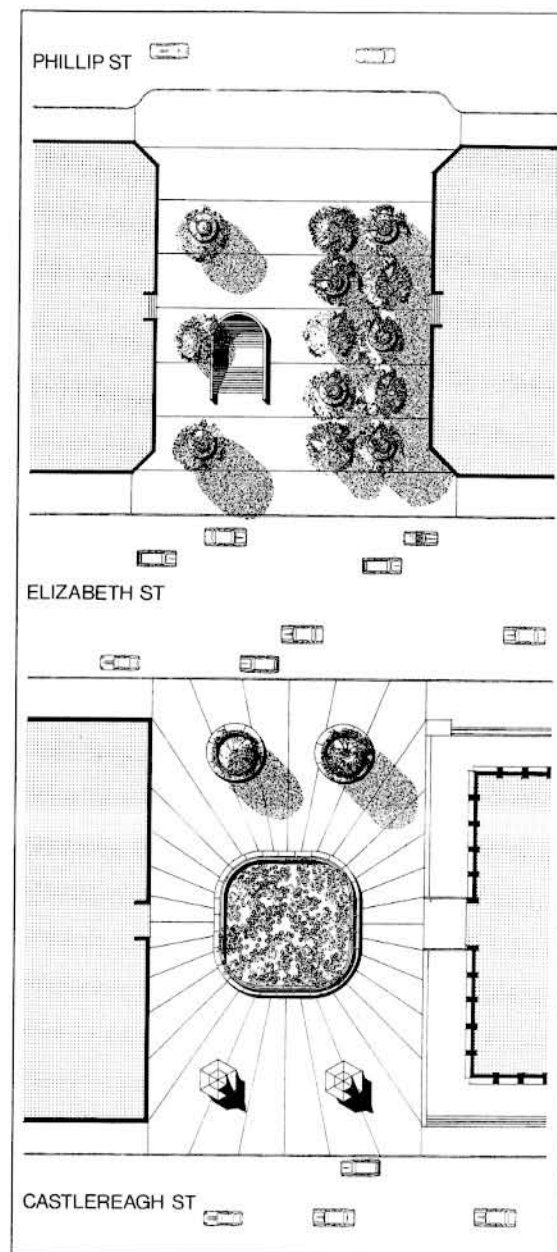
per cent of Australians live in the major cities. Of the total population, 41 per cent live in Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>3</sup> Public transportation systems leave much to be desired, and the predominance of car ownership and use has increased the problems. The decrease in amenities, market forces following American examples, and the increasing spread of the suburbs has led to deconcentration with the establishment of local and regional centres. But Australia's urban cores never died.

The Labor government turned its attention to the cities. It favoured decentralisation and proposed the founding of new growth centres away from the major cities. Monarto in South Australia, the twin towns of Albury-Wodonga on the New South Wales/Victorian border and Bathurst-Orange in New South Wales were chosen to relieve the pressures on the capital cities. Bonuses to private industries and the relocation of some government offices in the growth centres were among the means proposed to stimulate development. With the return of the Liberal government, funds for these urban decentralisation schemes were reduced and the projects for Monarto and Bathurst-Orange were abandoned.

The future of the inner cities was under threat. The Council of the City of Sydney responded first with the Strategic Plan of 1971. It was an enlightened proposal that set forth goals rather than restrictions and a series of 'Action Plans' that could be implemented within reasonable time and economic limits. Among its stated objectives was the undertaking to 'Conserve, enhance and improve the physical environment of the City'.<sup>4</sup> The plight of the pedestrian was recognised and mandatory requirements and incentive programmes were introduced to upgrade facilities. Thanks to this plan, some far-sighted aldermen such as the then mayor, Leo Port, and some fine architectural design, Sydney, after having experienced most of the trauma, emerged with reinvigorated spirit.

Following European examples, one of the first steps taken by the councils of the cities was the closure of some central streets for pedestrian use only. Limited and hesitant in redesign as most of these 'malls' are, they have been met with popular acclaim. The most impressive result of street closure is Gazzard's design for Martin Place in Sydney, which was

refurbished in stages between 1971 and 1979.<sup>5</sup> The original Martin Place was a broad, sloping street of five city blocks in length, lined along its western end with the 1866 General Post Office and other early, dignified, stone edifices that just survived the wave of demolition. Towards the east, the old buildings were less fortunate and modern works with flat facades took their place. The plaza is visually closed across its short dimensions by solid 19th and



**Martin Place, Sydney, 1971-79. Clarke Gazzard and Partners 1971-76. Donald Gazzard and Associates, 1976-79.**

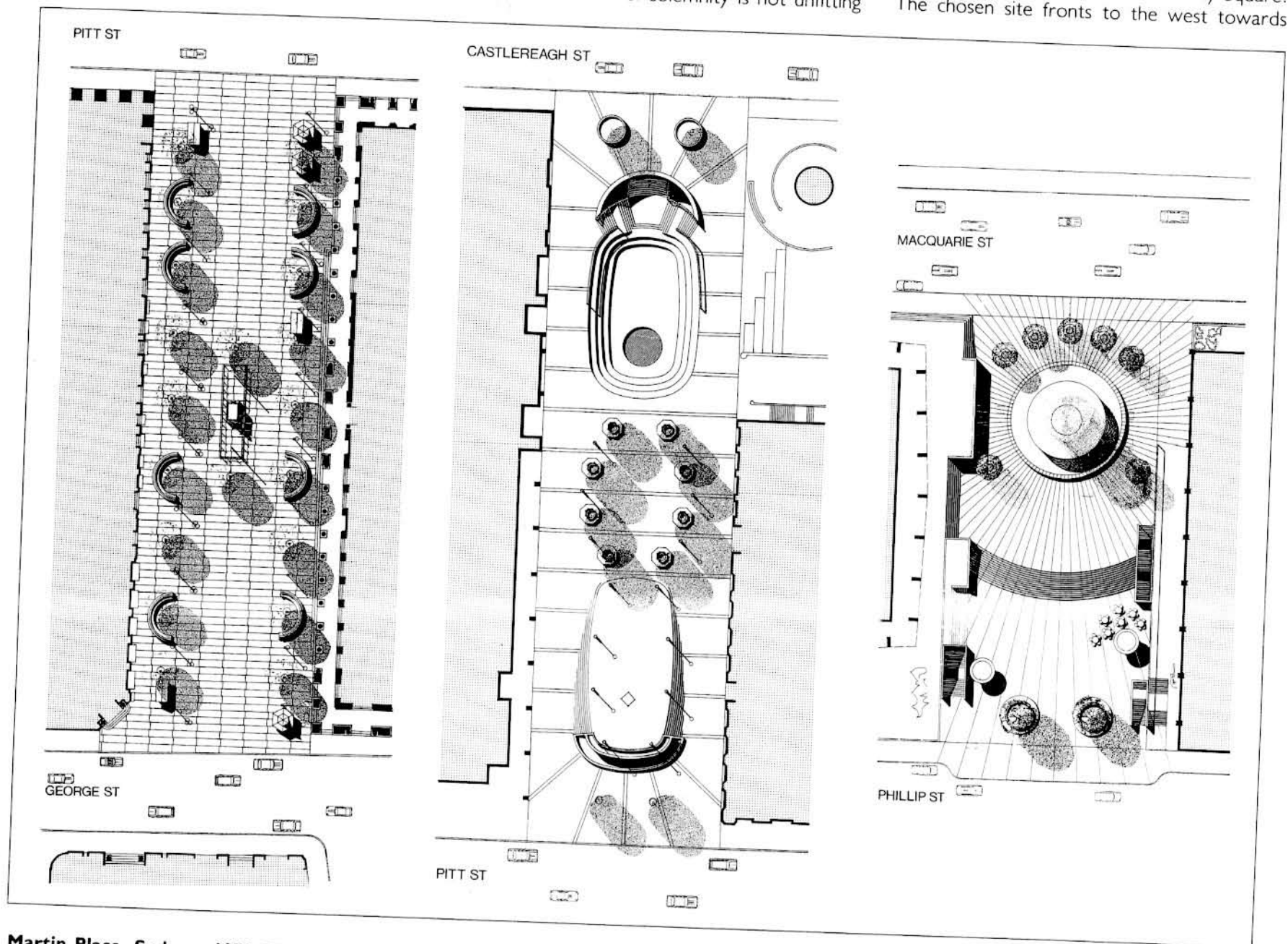
early 20th century work. Due to its ratio of length to width and the wall-like nature of its enclosure, Martin Place has the quality of an outside room, reminiscent of some of the large squares of Europe.

Gazzard has respected the order of the place with a symmetrical treatment of introduced artifacts and planting. The reconstructed granite-faced paving, benches and trees have been chosen for their simplicity.

This is countered by the fanciful design of the flower, fruit and newspaper selling carts. The main features of the plaza follow each other up the centre of the square. These include fountains, sculptures, a concert bowl, and the entry to the new station of the recently completed Eastern Suburbs Electric Railway. The presence of the Cenotaph restricted the nature of introduced features at the western end of the plaza, but a note of solemnity is not unfitting

for this central urban place. Despite some lack of consonance between parts of the design, particularly to the east, Martin Place is a fine public space much used by the citizens of Sydney.

Increased concern for the city became equally evident in Melbourne. In 1975-1976 a competition, open to Victorian architects only, was held for the design of a new City Square. The chosen site fronts to the west towards



**Martin Place, Sydney, 1971-79. Clarke Gazzard and Partners 1971-76.  
Donald Gazzard and Associates, 1976-79.**





Design Centre, Adelaide, 1980. Geof Nairn.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: SCOTT WILSON

ible redevelopment for several blocks of central Adelaide. It is one of a group of similar structures, the further renovation of which could give the city a distinctive central precinct rich in interest and character.

Sydney's most extensive recycling venture involved the conversion of harbourside warehouses at Birkenhead Point into a large, mixed, retail market. The Birkenhead Market Scheme was instigated by private enterprise to provide a market based on bulk buying and discount retail outlets. The project was undertaken in a highly promotional manner with related attractions of a maritime museum and an extensive marina. The early 20th century warehouses which were owned by a rubber importing company, stand towards the end of the point of the 7½ hectare site. The architects for the scheme were the Sydney firm Jackson, Teece, Chesterman and Willis. Work commenced in 1975 and was completed in 1979. The total venture has proved popular with the purchas-



Birkenhead Point, Sydney. Renovation 1979.  
Jackson Teece Chesterman and Willis.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: KATE WIMBLE

ing public. Architecturally it is successful from the water and the approaching road systems as the buildings are handsome and the adjoining parking levels have been well integrated into the sloping site. Signs, and the colours of the introduced modern services are particularly well chosen. Close up it too clearly shows the results of the restrictions on the budget and the unfortunate location of new work, such as the parking station that intrudes between the market area and the northern waterfront. Still, Birkenhead Point was a daring development that has preserved some important landmarks, waterfront buildings and added variety to urban life.

As land prices escalated and the attraction of the cities increased, both clients and architects showed more interest in the potential of existing houses. Renovation covered the range from virtual rebuild to restoration. The amount of work in this area continues to grow. The spectrum of approaches is evident in the

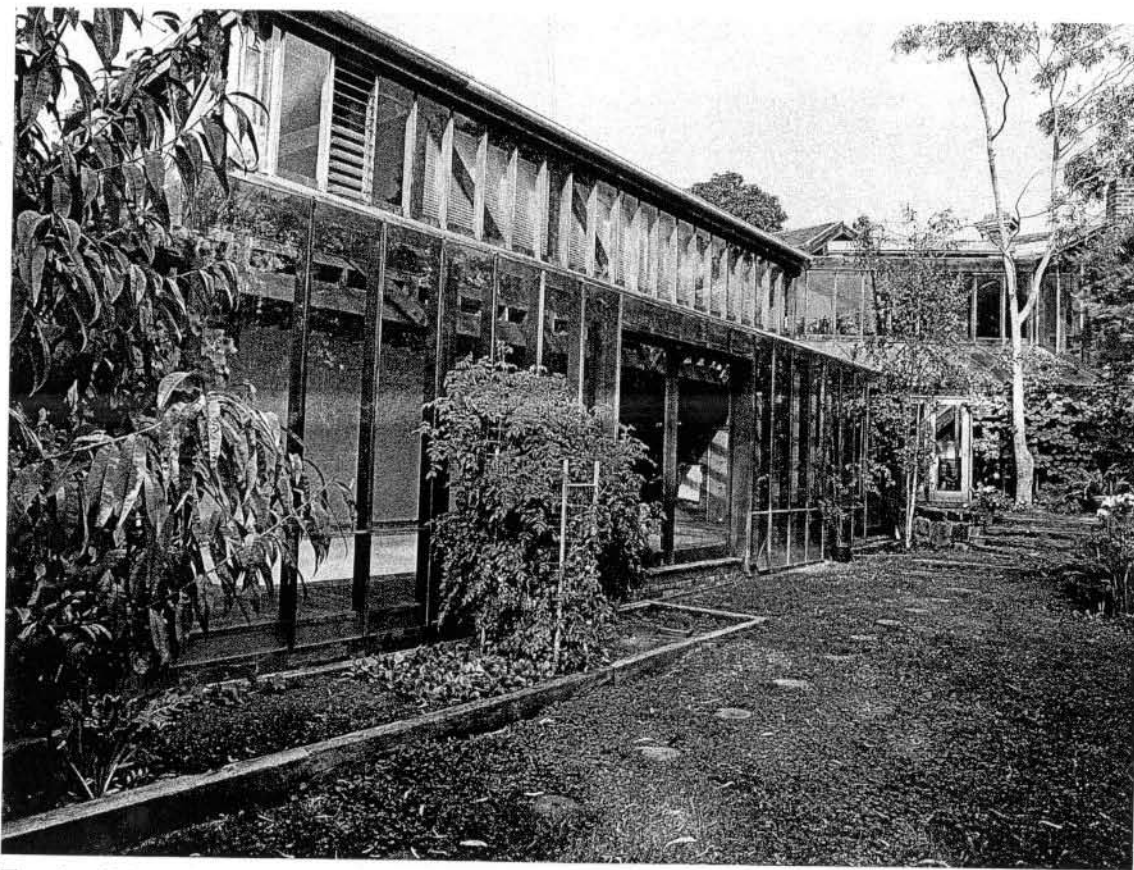
work of Max May in Melbourne. May belongs in the mainstream of Melbourne developments in the 1970s.

He is a practical designer and his delight in exploring fresh ideas for functional solutions has led him into product design as well as building design.

In housing renovations, as in the full gamut of his work, the architecture is widely varied. The Spicer House of 1977 stands at the radical end of the spectrum of reconstruction. The existing house has been so extensively remodelled as to leave little clue of its previous life. The retention of the main building frame and floors of the house was a purely financial decision. From this basic starting point, May has produced a handsome modern house of large rooms and high ceilings for a greatly reduced cost to that of a new house of such dimensions. For buildings such as this, of little value in their original form, May is unhesitant in salvaging only sections of economic advantage.

Slightly more conservative is his treatment of the Tracksel House. The old house was an average, early 20th century, free-standing, brick bungalow. In the 1973 changes the existing home was left much as it was and to the rear May added a clashing raw timber and glass extension that, among its array of rooms, houses an indoor swimming pool. The huge timber truss that supports the span of the pool without apology, crashes through the house wall. The intentional conflict of scale and material changes are joined by the idiosyncratic touches of the owner to create a casual mix of contrasting elements. It is a house abounding in character, surprise and delight arising from the ad-hoc attitudes and gusto of both owner and architect.

The historical and architectural value of the Kimberley House posed quite a different problem. This handsome early mansion stands on a corner site in one of Melbourne's finer suburbs. The main part of the original house fol-



**Tracksel House, Melbourne. Renovation 1973. Max May.**

PHOTOGRAPHER: DAVID PARKER



**Kimberley House, Melbourne. Renovation 1979. Max May.**

PHOTOGRAPHER: DAVID PARKER



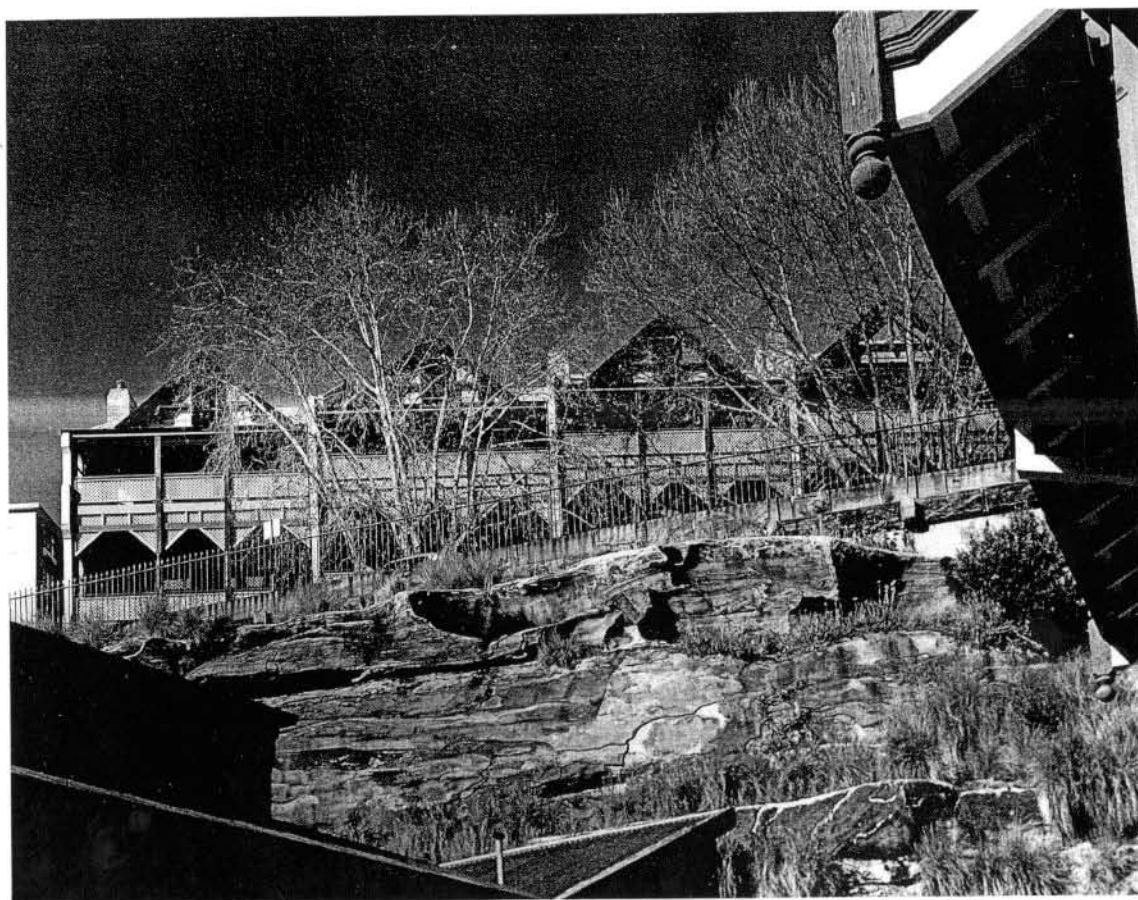
lows a balanced Regency plan with the rooms opening off a central octagonal hall. In this section of the house May restored the fabric and carefully integrated modern amenities in a manner undetrimental to the old work. Towards the rear of the building the extensions of a kitchen, sunroom and greenhouse continue the spirit but not the techniques of the original house. Timber appears again but now treated with an elegance markedly different from that in the Tracksel House. The out-buildings and pool are gently connected to the house by a glazed fernery.

May has been involved in many renovation projects in Melbourne and his work shows a free attitude and inventive mind that makes the most of the best of what is given and gives it new life for today's purposes. An increasing number of architects are turning their attention to such work and the older suburbs of the cities are enriched because of it.

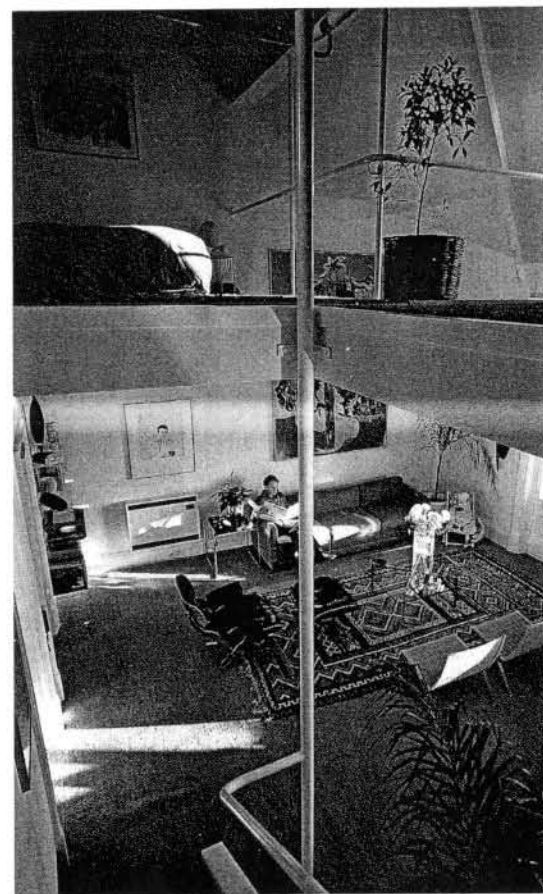
Most important for the future well-being of the social life of the inner belts of the cities were the changed attitudes to the central existing housing stock. The Victorian terrace house was seen to have convenience and charm; qualities overlooked in the renewal programmes of the previous decades. These previously neglected houses were restored and became the homes of those tired of long commuting times to the suburban areas, and prepared to exchange the comfortable but somewhat stultifying life of the suburbs for the variety and vitality of the city area. Large terraces were converted to apartments. The contemporary approaches are well shown in the work on a row of picturesque 1897 terraces in Victoria Street, Kings Cross, by Peter Stronach. The firm of Marsh Freedman was again involved here in the selection of colour schemes, some interior design, and with one principal as client for one of the nine apart-

ments. The exterior of the terrace retains its romantic character but the detail and colour schemes, rather than following the originals, are new and inventive. It is a lively composition that tinges the forms of yesteryear with the flavour of today. Internally, the terraces that were converted into apartments in 1919 have been dramatically transformed. Modern services, introduced structure such as false mezzanine floors, are cleverly integrated with the architecture of the old rooms. There is no hesitancy in the insistence on a contemporary idiom in the use of white walls, glass block and stainless steel. The main work on the terraces was completed in 1980 and the absence of a rigid, conservationist approach denotes changes in attitude towards the intrusion of new work in old buildings.

Two ambitious schemes for the retention and upgrading of inner city housing were undertaken in Sydney. Both were government



**Victoria Street Apartments, Sydney, 1979.**  
Allen Jack and Cottier.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: MAX DUPAIN



**Victoria Street Apartments, Sydney, 1979.**  
Allen Jack and Cottier. Interior.  
PHOTOGRAPHER: MAX DUPAIN

supported projects to retain accommodation for low-income groups in the central areas. The lessons of the Carlton and Paddington areas had been well learnt. It was obvious that the increasing attraction of the inner city for the more affluent members of society was creating a market situation that displaced the original occupants. The high-rise solution had proved unacceptable for low-income families. Only slightly less desirable was the location of government assisted housing on the fringes of the cities. The intervention of government in buying and thus removing pockets of inner city housing from real estate pressure, appeared an alternative.

In 1974 the federal government purchased 700 properties held by the Anglican Church in a 19 hectare area of the suburb of Glebe.<sup>20</sup> These were mostly small, workers' cottages. They were scattered, sometimes in rows and sometimes on individual lots, through the area. The Department of Housing and Construction was charged to undertake the upgrading of the properties with regard to both the utility of the dwellings, and their visual appearance to

the street. At the time of the instigation of the project, interest in accurate building restoration was at its peak. Consequently the aim was to re-present the facades of the Glebe cottages as closely as possible to their original appearance. The value of this approach can be questioned but with Lucas as consultant on the scheme the houses with their striped iron verandah canopies, latticework, and picket fences, have an air of authenticity that avoids caricature. The anticipation that the government work would so upgrade the environment that it would lead to similar efforts in privately owned property has only been met by a few isolated endeavours.

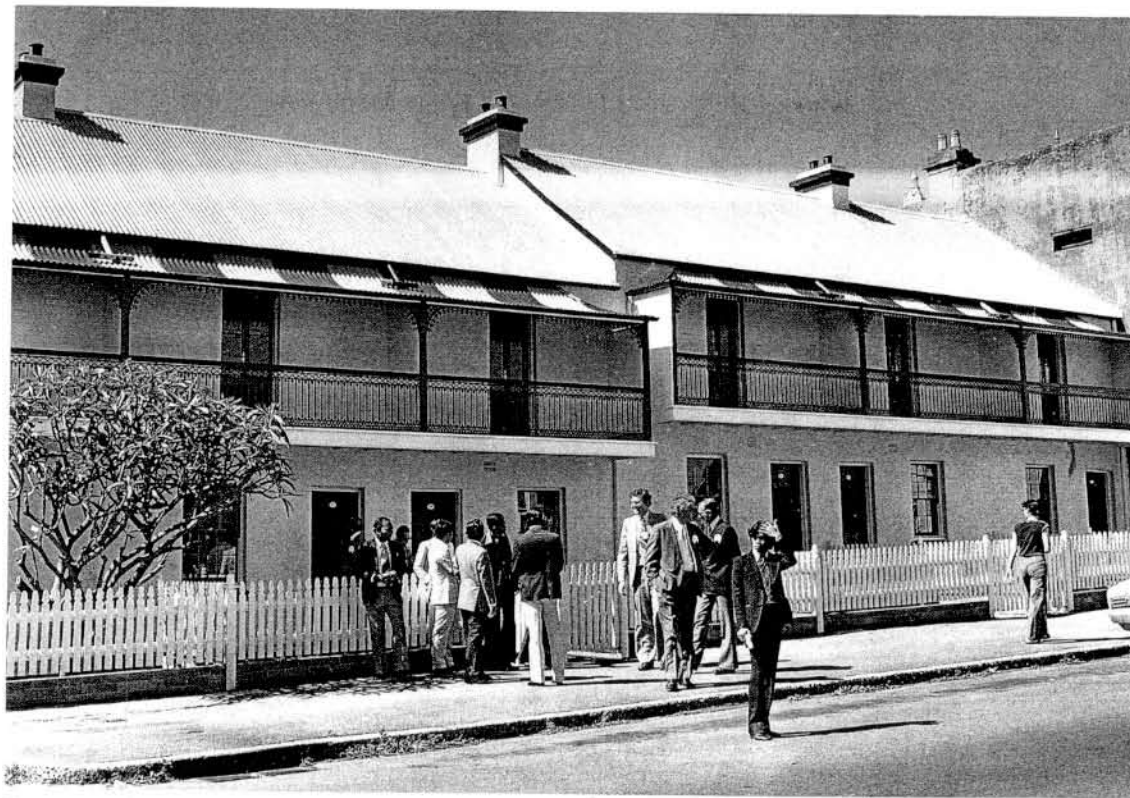
Consequently Glebe is a patchwork of delight and disrepair, which perhaps saves it from falling into the realm of artificiality. Socially the scheme has proved successful. Those displaced from the dwellings during reconstruction were given the option of returning to their own houses, to others available in the area or to other housing schemes in the city. The experiment at Glebe has maintained a viable community.

More ambitious than that at Glebe was the housing scheme for Woolloomooloo.<sup>21</sup> The Woolloomooloo Project was a joint venture between federal, State and local government with design and administrative responsibilities for the central basin vested in the New South Wales Housing Commission, under the direction of the Project Manager, John Devenish.

Woolloomooloo was the most volatile battleground in the fight of the early 1970s to conserve the centres of the cities. The speculation of the 1960s had left the area in a deplorable state of neglect. Conditions of the remaining residents in the area were poor indeed. Encouraged by those looking to the future of the area not as office enclaves but as low-income housing, a resident group was formed to 'Save the Loo'. The architect-planner, Colin James, was appointed in March 1974 as the Residents' Advocate to liaise between the residents and the various levels of government. James' role was crucial in establishing the understanding and subsequent outcome of the dispute that resulted in the Woolloomooloo Project. James was an ideal person for this position. Both he and the 'low-key' office he established in a rundown building in Woolloomooloo were approachable by the residents and he was equally apt in negotiating with the decision-makers. James resigned from this position in October 1983.

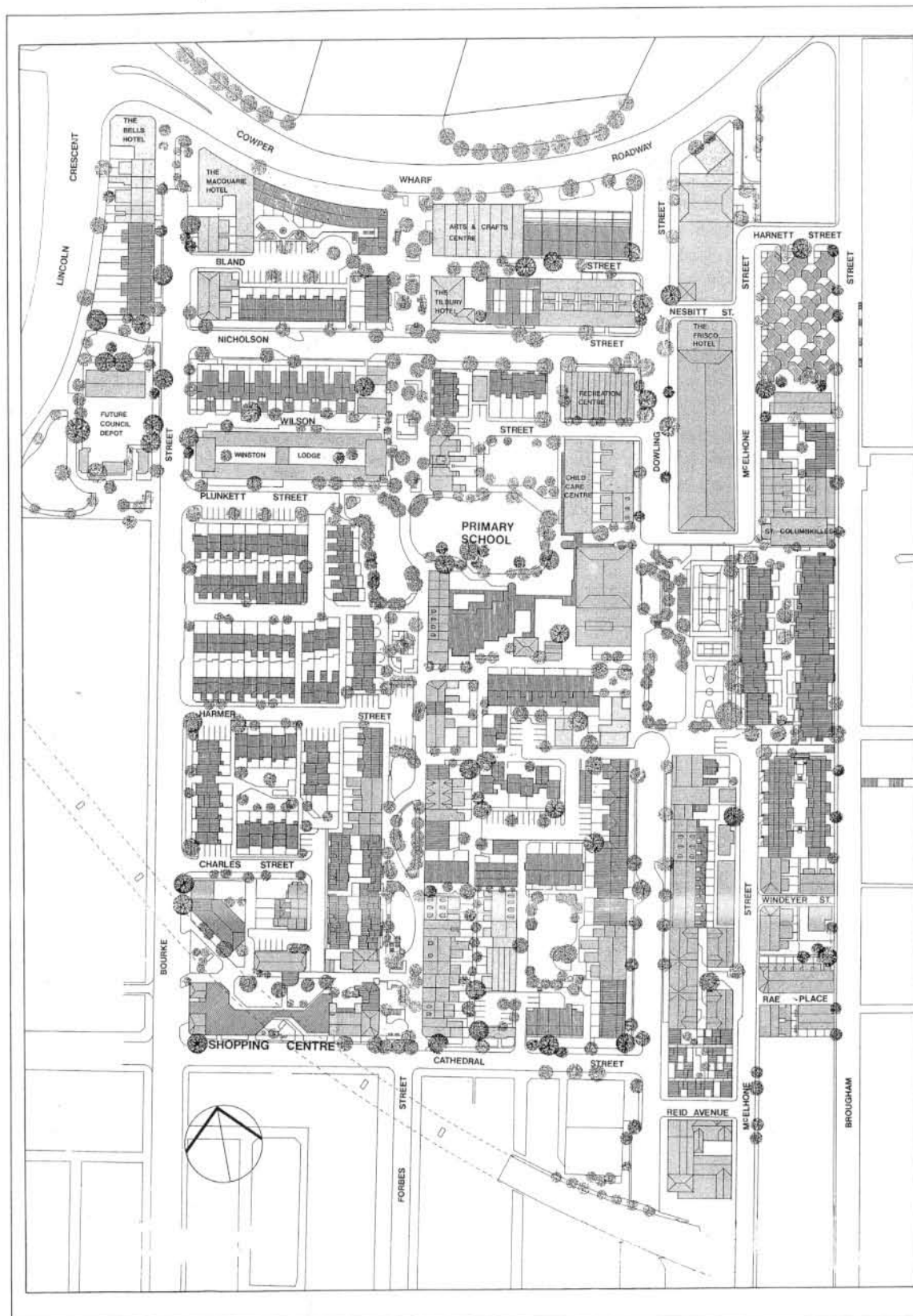
An initial step towards the development of the basin was the commissioning of architectural firms to prepare schemes for the area. Instructions to each designer differed with regard to percentage of the existing building stock to be preserved and the level of density required. The task allotted each firm was based on their attitudes and expertise. For example, the lowest density and highest percentage of buildings to be retained was asked from Fisher Lucas. The schemes were displayed and comment encouraged. On the basis of the information obtained and an intensive feasibility analysis, the implemented scheme was prepared.

Unlike the Glebe housing, the Woolloomooloo Project has clearly defined boundaries. The area is contained by the Cahill Expressway and central business district to the west, the cliffs of Kings Cross to the east, Woolloomooloo Bay to the north and the Eastern Suburbs Railway to the south. The basis of the scheme was

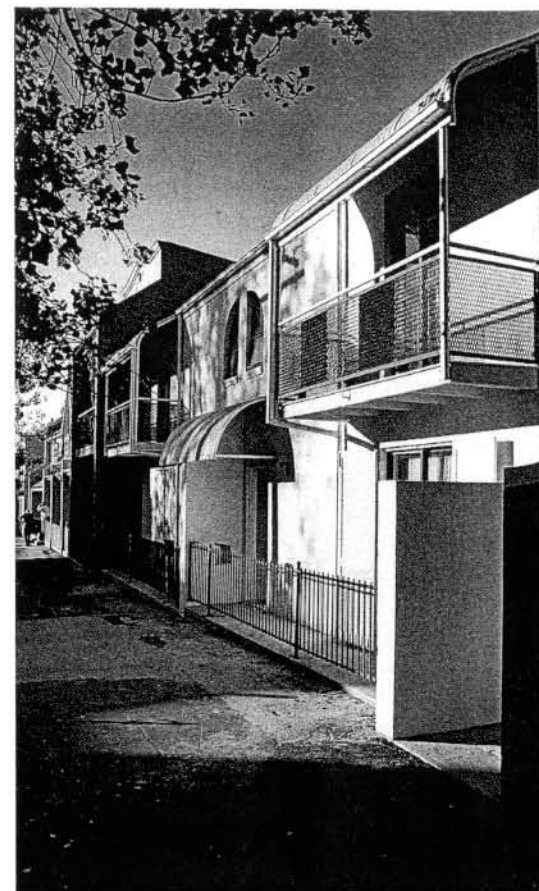


Restored cottages, Glebe, Sydney, 1977.  
Department of Housing and Construction.





**Woolloomooloo Project Plan. The Housing Commission of New South Wales.**



**Forbes Street terrace houses, Woolloomooloo, Sydney, 1980. Allen Jack and Cottier. PHOTOGRAPHER: DAVID MOORE**

the renovation of as many of the remaining buildings as was possible, and the introduction of new housing of a similar scale and character. A zone of higher density fringed the scheme at the base of the escarpment on the Kings Cross side. Schools, shops and recreational facilities were provided in old or new buildings. The area was segregated from through traffic and the closure of inner streets created an extensive area for pedestrian use.

One of the keys to the particular quality of Woolloomooloo comes from the policy of 'controlled diversity'. Of the 30 separate projects involved in the scheme, six were undertaken by the Housing Commission, the others being commissioned to 18 private architects.

As Canberra is a gallery for Australian architecture, the Woolloomooloo scheme is a gallery for Sydney, medium density, urban housing. Most of the leading firms are represented. The contributions vary from one or two infill



houses to clusters of 40 or more dwellings. While the majority of the new buildings follow the established terrace alignment and three-storeyed height of the older houses, their arrangement and expression is widely varied. A balance has been struck here between overall control and individual licence. Initially strictures were too tight and the lessening of constraints has led to a richer result. Accommodation ranges from multiple units to family houses and these are mixed throughout the area. Materials, colours, paving and landscaping are varied from house to house and group to group. Perhaps even more important is the

constantly changing configuration of open space. Each dwelling, each place, has its own particular character.

Significant for the coherence of the project is the brightly painted school that in a rather fanciful way combines new work with old to produce a distinct result. New work links together a wide range of old buildings including small cottages and a row of early terraces. The design by Barry Sneyd of the Government Architect's Branch is well integrated in the surrounding fabric of Woolloomooloo and retains some important streetscapes. The recycled buildings also serve as after-school and pre-

school centres, migrant teaching units, and provide for community functions such as craft classes and dramatic performances. It is the true social focus of Woolloomooloo.

As with Glebe, the premise for this particular type of development is open to debate. Medium density of use for such centrally located land and the neo-vernacular character of the architecture can be challenged as retrogressive. Despite such reservations, the Woolloomooloo scheme provides a striking testimonial to the idealism and ideals of the 1970s that countered the trend of the previous decade and brought a new humanism to the cities.